### Racism NOT Race

#### There is no ontological antagonism; rather, there are many racial formations. Their theory negates the power people of color have in racial formations—turns alt solvency

Michael OMI, Associate Professor at UC Berkeley, AND Howard WINANT, Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, 13 [“Resistance is futile?: a response to Feagin and Elias,” Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 36, Issue 6, 2013]

Their essay has an overly tendentious tone and sometimes misreads and misinterprets our book. Still there are many points of agreement between the racial formation and systemic racism theories. Where we disagree most strongly is over our respective understanding of racial politics. Feagin and Elias focus so intensely on racism that they lose sight of the complexities of race and the variations that exist among and within racially defined groups. In their ‘systemic racism’ account white racist rule is so comprehensive and absolute that the political power and agency of people of colour virtually disappear. Indeed, the ‘white racial frame’ (Feagin 2009) is so omnipotent that white racism seems to usurp and monopolize all political space in the USA. Yes, ‘counter framing’ is present, but it appears marginal at best, unable effectively to challenge the pervasiveness, persistence and power of white racism. Since Feagin and Elias dismiss ideas of ‘racial democracy’ tout court, their perspective makes it difficult to understand how anti-racist mobilization or political reform could ever have occurred in the past or could ever take place in the future. They see racism as so exclusively white that any notion of white anti-racism is virtually ignored and completely unexplained.

Despite Feagin and Elias's good intentions of linking their analysis to anti-racist practice, we believe their views have quite the opposite effect: without intending to do so, they dismiss the political agency of people of colour and of anti-racist whites. In Feagin/Elias's view, ‘systemic racism’ is like the Borg in the Star Trek series: a hive-mind phenomenon that assimilates all it touches. As the Borg announce in their collective audio message to intended targets, ‘Resistance is futile’.

We have a smaller space than the main essay, so we'll dispense with a point-by-point refutation of their understanding of racial formation theory. We assume readers of Racial Formation and of our other work know that we are not closet neocons, that we consider racism a foundational and continuous part of US history (and indeed modern world history), that we agree that whites have been the primary creators and beneficiaries of racist institutions and practices, and that we not only respect but also situate ourselves in the black radical tradition, especially the Duboisian tradition. We will focus on our fundamental point of disagreement with Feagin and Elias – how we respectively understand the very nature of racial politics in the USA.

Here we will engage Feagin and Elias on a few important questions that will highlight both where we agree and where we disagree. Our topics are as follows:

• What is the relationship between race and racism?

• What is distinctive about our own historical epoch in the USA – from post-Second World War to the present – with respect to race and racism?

• What are the political implications of contemporary racial trends?

We discuss these questions with the intent of clarifying racial formation theory as well as sharpening the debate with the systemic racism perspective. We appreciate the opportunity to do so.

What is the relationship between race and racism?

In Racial Formation we suggest that the concepts of race and racism should be distinguished and not be used interchangeably (Omi and Winant 1994, p. 71). Some have argued that race is solely a product of racist domination; on that account race does not exist outside of racism. As readers of Ethnic and Racial Studies well know, many writers place quotation marks around race (‘race’) to distinguish their use of the concept from popular biological notions of human variation. This is meant to designate the wobbly social scientific status of the race concept.

In contrast to this perspective, we consider race to be real because it is ‘real in its consequences.’1 Our ideas about how the meaning of race is produced are basically Duboisian and Jamesian: we all make our racial identities, though we do not make them under circumstances of our own choosing. Race and racism do not exist merely because of white domination, but also because of resistance and independent action: what C. L. R. James called ‘self-activity’ (James, Lee, and Castoriadis 2005 [1958], p. 99). The process of making and remaking race – racial formation – is fundamentally political. It is about the ‘freedom dreams’ (Kelley 2002) that shape racial conflict as much as the white racism emphasized by Feagin and Elias.

As Feagin and Elias acknowledge, we have developed a fairly detailed approach to racial politics, centred on the constant and cumulative interaction of what we call ‘racial projects’. In our account, racial formation proceeds through such projects, which both signify upon race (representing it, interpreting it) and reciprocally structure social relationships (of power, inequality, solidarity, etc.) according to race. If there is a disagreement with Feagin and Elias here, it seems to be about how much power people of colour have in this process of race-making, this racial formation process. In their account, the very meaning of race is overwhelmingly, if not totally, shaped by a ‘white racial frame’. By contrast, we believe that people of colour have a lot of power in the production of racial meanings, much more than Feagin and Elias are willing to concede.

OK, what about racism? There are points of agreement and difference between Feagin and Elias's perspective and ours. We provide a hard-core definition and extensive discussion (Omi and Winant 1994, pp. 69–76), defining racism as a racial project that combines essentialist representations of race (stereotyping, xenophobia, aversion, etc.) with patterns of domination (violence, hierarchy, super-exploitation, etc.). Racism ‘marks’ certain visible characteristics of the human body for purposes of domination. It naturalizes and reifies these instrumental distinctions. Racism is the product of modern history: empire and conquest, race-based slavery, and race-based genocide have shaped the modern world; they have been met with resistance and sometimes revolution, also race-based in crucial ways. This is where race comes from: the drive to rule, and the imperative to resist.

Feagin and Elias think (white) racism shapes race. Although they read us quite selectively and negatively here, they recognize that we also identify whites as the most comprehensive practitioners and by far the greatest beneficiaries of racist practices. We agree that racism is a ferocious force, a deeply structured-in dimension of US (and world) society. But this is apparently not enough: Feagin and Elias also want to confine racist agency to whites and whites alone. We argue that not all racism is white, and that people of colour can practise racism as well.

Let us look more deeply at this question. Who is white? Beyond the question of the contingent and highly porous boundaries of this group lies the question of whether there are any ‘positive’ dimensions of white identity or whether it is a purely ‘negative’ quality, signifying only the absence of ‘colour’.2

Then there is the ‘white privilege’ question, which builds on Du Bois's analysis (1999, p. 700) of the ‘psychological wage’ received by poor whites in virtue of their race. While we are in substantial agreement with the ‘privilege’ argument regarding whites’ ‘possessive investment’ in racism (Lipsitz 1998), there are problems there too. How do we account for white anti-racism if we understand privilege as the source of racism? Is white anti-racism even possible, if racism is envisioned as an economistic zero-sum game in which clear winners and losers are demarcated?

We think that race is so profoundly a lived-in and lived-out part of both social structure and identity that it exceeds and transcends racism – thereby allowing for resistance to racism. Race, therefore, is more than ‘racism’; it is a fully fledged ‘social fact’ like sex/gender or class. From this perspective, race shapes racism as much as racism shapes race. Racial identities (individual and group), and other race-oriented concepts as well, are unstable. They are not uniforms; races are not teams; they are not defined solely by antagonism to one another. They vary internally and ideologically; they overlap and mix; their positions in the social structure shift; in other words they are shaped by political conflict.

In Feagin and Elias's account, white racist rule in the USA appears unalterable and permanent. There is little sense that the ‘white racial frame’ evoked by systemic racism theory changes in significant ways over historical time. They dismiss important rearrangements and reforms as merely ‘a distraction from more ingrained structural oppressions and deep lying inequalities that continue to define US society’ (Feagin and Elias 2012, p. 21). Feagin and Elias use a concept they call ‘surface flexibility’ to argue that white elites frame racial realities in ways that suggest change, but are merely engineered to reinforce the underlying structure of racial oppression.

Feagin and Elias say the phrase ‘racial democracy’ is an oxymoron – a word defined in the dictionary as a figure of speech that combines contradictory terms. If they mean the USA is a contradictory and incomplete democracy in respect to race and racism issues, we agree. If they mean that people of colour have no democratic rights or political power in the USA, we disagree. The USA is a racially despotic country in many ways, but in our view it is also in many respects a racial democracy, capable of being influenced towards more or less inclusive and redistributive economic policies, social policies, or for that matter, imperial policies.

What is distinctive about our own epoch in the USA (post-Second World War to the present) with respect to race and racism?

Over the past decades there has been a steady drumbeat of efforts to contain and neutralize civil rights, to restrict racial democracy, and to maintain or even increase racial inequality. Racial disparities in different institutional sites – employment, health, education – persist and in many cases have increased. Indeed, the post-2008 period has seen a dramatic increase in racial inequality. The subprime home mortgage crisis, for example, was a major racial event. Black and brown people were disproportionately affected by predatory lending practices; many lost their homes as a result; race-based wealth disparities widened tremendously. It would be easy to conclude, as Feagin and Elias do, that white racial dominance has been continuous and unchanging throughout US history. But such a perspective misses the dramatic twists and turns in racial politics that have occurred since the Second World War and the civil rights era.

Feagin and Elias claim that we overly inflate the significance of the changes wrought by the civil rights movement, and that we ‘overlook the serious reversals of racial justice and persistence of huge racial inequalities’ (Feagin and Elias 2012, p. 21) that followed in its wake. We do not. In Racial Formation we wrote about ‘racial reaction’ in a chapter of that name, and elsewhere in the book as well. Feagin and Elias devote little attention to our arguments there; perhaps because they are in substantial agreement with us. While we argue that the right wing was able to ‘rearticulate’ race and racism issues to roll back some of the gains of the civil rights movement, we also believe that there are limits to what the right could achieve in the post-civil rights political landscape.

So we agree that the present prospects for racial justice are demoralizing at best. But we do not think that is the whole story. US racial conditions have changed over the post-Second World War period, in ways that Feagin and Elias tend to downplay or neglect. Some of the major reforms of the 1960s have proved irreversible; they have set powerful democratic forces in motion. These racial (trans)formations were the results of unprecedented political mobilizations, led by the black movement, but not confined to blacks alone. Consider the desegregation of the armed forces, as well as key civil rights movement victories of the 1960s: the Voting Rights Act, the Immigration and Naturalization Act (Hart- Celler), as well as important court decisions like Loving v. Virginia that declared anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. While we have the greatest respect for the late Derrick Bell, we do not believe that his ‘interest convergence hypothesis’ effectively explains all these developments. How does Lyndon Johnson's famous (and possibly apocryphal) lament upon signing the Civil Rights Act on 2 July 1964 – ‘We have lost the South for a generation’ – count as ‘convergence’?

The US racial regime has been transformed in significant ways. As Antonio Gramsci argues, hegemony proceeds through the incorporation of opposition (Gramsci 1971, p. 182). The civil rights reforms can be seen as a classic example of this process; here the US racial regime – under movement pressure – was exercising its hegemony. But Gramsci insists that such reforms – which he calls ‘passive revolutions’ – cannot be merely symbolic if they are to be effective: oppositions must win real gains in the process. Once again, we are in the realm of politics, not absolute rule.

So yes, we think there were important if partial victories that shifted the racial state and transformed the significance of race in everyday life. And yes, we think that further victories can take place both on the broad terrain of the state and on the more immediate level of social interaction: in daily interaction, in the human psyche and across civil society. Indeed we have argued that in many ways the most important accomplishment of the anti-racist movement of the 1960s in the USA was the politicization of the social. In the USA and indeed around the globe, race-based movements demanded not only the inclusion of racially defined ‘others’ and the democratization of structurally racist societies, but also the recognition and validation by both the state and civil society of racially-defined experience and identity. These demands broadened and deepened democracy itself. They facilitated not only the democratic gains made in the USA by the black movement and its allies, but also the political advances towards equality, social justice and inclusion accomplished by other ‘new social movements’: second-wave feminism, gay liberation, and the environmentalist and anti-war movements among others.

By no means do we think that the post-war movement upsurge was an unmitigated success. Far from it: all the new social movements were subject to the same ‘rearticulation’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, p. xii) that produced the racial ideology of ‘colourblindness’ and its variants; indeed all these movements confronted their mirror images in the mobilizations that arose from the political right to counter them. Yet even their incorporation and containment, even their confrontations with the various ‘backlash’ phenomena of the past few decades, even the need to develop the highly contradictory ideology of ‘colourblindness’, reveal the transformative character of the ‘politicization of the social’. While it is not possible here to explore so extensive a subject, it is worth noting that it was the long-delayed eruption of racial subjectivity and self-awareness into the mainstream political arena that set off this transformation, shaping both the democratic and anti-democratic social movements that are evident in US politics today.

### AT: “Black Ontology”

#### The suggestion that blackness is ontologically founded in antithesis to enlightenment humanity ignores the changing way in which coloniality and exclusion operate. This locks the alt into a purely conflictual, rather than collaborate, paradigm preventing solvency.

Banerjea ‘2 [Koushik, Lecturer in Sociology at South Bank University, London (2002) “The tyranny of the binary: race, nation and the logic of failing liberalisms,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 25:4]

The encounter between Fanon and Sartre in many ways casts the dye for the ‘special relationship’ fostered between a fetishised black ontology and nefarious neo-liberal discourses. And in the background, the Holocaust, located temporally, spatially, demographically within the modernist imaginary; a sort of catalytic converter translating anti-humanist guilt into a newfangled humanist metanarration: one where the thorny problem of ontological slaughter is at once eased by the evocation of binary equivalence. How better to forge a fateful compact between modernity and dissonance than through a calculated proscription of the Enlightenment’s failed promises? The dualisms of progress and barbarity are subsequently rerouted through the temporal iconography of ‘the Jew’ and ‘the Negro’,2 with a special premium placed upon the implied family romance of ‘imagined community’. The instruction is clear enough: these are subjectivities which bear unique witness to the failings of Europe as its Enlightenment pretensions are laid bare by the ghosts of Dachau, the horror of the Middle Passage. The suggestion is that the historical institutions of the concentration camp and the plantation have more in common than a shared distaste for the ‘normal’ juridical rules; more even than their twin assumptions of coerced labour and population management. Rather, both are to be seen as profoundly modern forms of political administration, which particularize through their myriad brutalisms a nascent dissident consciousness.

Here the concept of postmodernity might provide a useful . . . means to mark the irretrievable loss of that innocence in truth-seeking and history-writing for which the histories of blacks and Jews in the modern Western world provide the best, that is most inhumane, examples. (Gilroy 2000, p. 96)

The problem with this dissenting formation is that it manifestly proscribes the limits of modernity, selfhood and alterity precisely where it matters most: in the interstices between modernity’s exclusionary character and its revolutionary promise. If ontological ‘double consciousness’ (DuBois 1982) functions as the proposed corollary of a sharply rationed metaphysics, then what chance is there of metaphysical humanism in its ethical interruption of raciology? Indeed, what chance of a re-thinking of contemporary dispossessions (for instance, Palestine), or of the multiethnic appeal of Islamophobia and ‘neighbourhood nationalisms’ within the modern, Western metropolis? Perhaps, most of all, how to reconcile Fanon’s terrible discovery that racial subjectivity is always predetermined from without, with the search for a conceptual form alive to the social antagonism of the metropolitan relation?

Elliptical fragments: public secrets, private lives

As with all such questions of ‘difference’, the critical dimension is not the imputed boundedness or particularity of any given subject position. Rather it is the moment when issues of power and authority are brought into play by the evocation of collective will; the circumstances which translate the multiple strategies of selfhood into the raw material for tactical opportunism. It is that point when uncomplicated notions of nation, state, class, community start to emerge from the profanities of the everyday; when identity is forged whole from the elliptical fragments of its social surroundings; and crucially, where the ‘minoritization’ of discourse may actually privilege the antagonistic and conflictual over the collaborative and dialogic. As Bhabha reminds us, ‘terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively’ (1994b, p. 270). Moreover, snapshots of this processual reconfiguration clearly occasion the realignment of habitual boundaries between the public and the private. They certainly interrupt the theoretical eulogy to development and progress which has of late been so much the staple of a narcissistic postmodern labour.

What is at issue then, is the exploration of questions of historical agency and social temporality that constitute the borderposts and frontlines of cultural production and dissemination. By focusing on “events,” “scenes,” “memories that flash up in a moment of danger” we hope to maintain a sense of the enactment of meanings and practices involved in the regulation of policy and in the formation of a politics, antagonistic or affiliative, that become the insignia of the interstices. (Bhabha 1994b, p. 270)

Bearing in mind that all cultural walls are porous, I want to suggest that several recent ‘events’ embodying that volatile cocktail of race, nation and culture have precisely seeped through into the ‘public’ consciousness in ways which exceed the limits of their production. Moreover, that the critical discourse which has attended that process itself belies the moral authority born of a smug, self-congratulatory (post)modernity. In each case the implication appears to be that what is always already known about contemporary dissidence forecloses the possibility, or the need, for further inquiry. Thus such apparently disparate events as a non-constitutional coup in Fiji, the murder of a young Asian man at the Millennium Notting Hill Carnival, and the allegations of corruption underwriting the ‘Hinduja’ affair, are shot through with the interpellative force of familiarity. But in the end it is the indeterminacy of the narrativization which absolves such cultural practice of its ethical considerations.

To be sure, at no stage since such events entered the public imaginary has an alternative theoretical compass been evoked to counter the navigational mythology of the mainstream. Thus no accounting for the cultural realignments hinted at by broadcaster, Darcus Howe in his televisual call to ‘black English’ or at least ‘black Englander’ arms.3 Not even the possibility that the boundary markers of Anglophone, Christian diaspora set the benchmark for that unsettling industry fetish, ‘managing diversity’. Certainly no indication that the peculiar invest- ments of certain black, British communities in those oft conflated concepts of Englishness and the nation, is the smallprint of a provisional clause: that the payoff for this insider status is a compensatory violence, both physical and metaphorical, directed against those tagged truly ‘other’: Turks, asylum-seekers, non-Christians. Most of all, there is no sense of interconnectedness, intersubjectivity, in the manner that such processes are themselves processed. At its worst, this simply replicates the dispiriting assumption that the road to belated modernity is paved with micro-political folly. Perhaps, in the end the absence of other ‘readings’ points to what Howe himself calls ‘the ease of presence’ apparently enjoyed by British, Caribbean communities. Comfort, after all, even a largely imaginary one, broaches a very traditional kind of apathy, a privatization of public concern.

Against this backdrop, plotting the nodal points of an imagined black, nationalist cartography, might actually re-engage its more fractious contours. It certainly begins the uneasy political work of re-defining the language and landscape not just of victimhood and terror; but of intermediary agency and complicity; and of shifting centres and martial men. From Fiji to Carnival to alleged ministerial impropriety, this then is an itinerant narration promulgated by its recognition of diversity even as it celebrates a polyglot failure to manage it. Guided by an iterative pulse, it is more concerned with the adjacent or lateral sites of enunciation than with the presumed moral rectitude inherent within a perpetual, ontological innocence. So not the usual fiction of the good natured underdog and his (for it is usually a he) institutional tormentors.

### AT: Pure Rejection Key

#### The idea of a completely pure rejection of the anti-black world both homogenizes experience and traps the figure of the Black as a fungible anchor for revolutionary impulse.

Walsh 15 [Shannon, “The Philosopher and His Poor: The Poor-Black as Object for Political Desire in South Africa,” *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, Volume 42, Issue 1, 2015, June 17, 2015]

Fantasy, optimism and the poor-Black as object

While Rancière claims that the poor as object creates possibility for the philosopher, Frank Wilderson goes further. Wilderson (2010) argues that the Human itself is forged through the denial of humanity to the Black.5 Through situating the Black as anti-human, object and voiceless, the Human is thus constituted. In South Africa, the Philosopher's poor is also, always, Black.

For the academic Left, I would argue that there is a cruelly optimistic attachment or relation with a fungible poor-Black. This optimistic relation is bound up with emancipatory, and sometimes pseudo-revolutionary, desires for another possible world. This attachment or relation is not limited to South Africa, but very often it is Black bodies (or the bodies of indigenous people) who are objectified for this kind of fantasy to play out. The fundamental antagonism is one in which the poor-Black is a repository for the projected desires and longings of (white) revolutionary fantasy—a strange nostalgia of some impossible vanquished time that existed in the pure space of non-knowledge.

Lauren Berlant reminds us that your desire misrecognizes a given object as that which will restore you to something that you sense effectively as a hole in you. Your object, then, does not express transparently who you ‘are’ but says something about what it takes for you to anchor yourself in space and time. (2011, 110)

This is a romance between the Human and the necessarily non-Human, the Other, which is always fantasy. The poor-Black becomes object onto which revolutionary desires can be projected and fantasized. For the revolutionary fantasy to hold, they must remain in their wretchedness, must remain as objects denied the complex existence—the being Human—enjoyed by those who hold the power of representation and fantasy construction. Of course, the horrible irony of such a situation is that while the poor-Black as an object of desire might offer an anchor for such ‘fantasmic investments’ towards a better world for the Left, in so doing it effectively denies that world from ever appearing. For how can such a world erupt from such a depraved and violent denial of being?

The fantasy of the fungible poor-Black is a romance full of optimism and aspirations, as well as full of dangerous denials and objectifications. Ultimately it is also a romance like any other: full of false hopes, good intentions and lots of fantasy (Bob 2005; Levenson 2012). The implication of leaving behind revolutionary subjectivities as vestibules for political optimism and hope is difficult, but it must be done. Indeed a critique of the ways social movements, and the poor-Black, have been constructed, and at times desired, in Left academia is crucial, and one that I hope will open spaces for reimagining what solidarity could look like. This is no easy task. As Berlant (2013) reflects,

All political movements … are complicated spaces where the courageous insistence on interrupting the reproduction of toxic normativity is a relief from resignation to life. But every movement that we've ever been in reproduces issues of inequality around race, gender, sexuality and education, along with the inevitable personality glitches. That also can be devastating.

Berlant encourages a dose of humour to counter the devastation, to laugh at the foibles, missteps and false romances. I sincerely hope that the fantasy can be abandoned, that there can be a way forward that will include a transparent reflection on the nature and exercise of political power within and around social movements in South Africa, reflection that takes seriously race, gender and institutional power.

### AT: State Bad

#### Complete rejection of institutional logic of civil society crushes anti-white supremacy politics.

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Questioning the Transformative View: Some Doubts About Trashing

The Critics' product is of limited utility to Blacks in its present form. The implications for Blacks of trashing liberal legal ideology are troubling, even though it may be proper to assail belief structures that obscure liberating possibilities. Trashing legal ideology seems to tell us repeatedly what has already been established -- that legal discourse is unstable and relatively indeterminate. Furthermore, trashing offers no idea of how to avoid the negative consequences of engaging in reformist discourse or how to work around such consequences. Even if we imagine the wrong world when we think in terms of legal discourse, we must nevertheless exist in a present world where legal protection has at times been a blessing -- albeit a mixed one. The fundamental problem is that, although Critics criticize law because it functions to legitimate existing institutional arrangements, it is precisely this legitimating function that has made law receptive to certain demands in this area. The Critical emphasis on deconstruction as the vehicle for liberation leads to the conclusion that engaging in legal discourse should be avoided because it reinforces not only the discourse itself but also the society and the world that it embodies. Yet Critics offer little beyond this observation. Their focus on delegitimating rights rhetoric seems to suggest that, once rights rhetoric has been discarded, there exists a more productive strategy for change, one which does not reinforce existing patterns of domination. Unfortunately, no such strategy has yet been articulated, and it is difficult to imagine that racial minorities will ever be able to discover one. As Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward point out in their [\*1367] excellent account of the civil rights movement, popular struggles are a reflection of institutionally determined logic and a challenge to that logic. 137 People can only demand change in ways that reflect the logic of the institutions that they are challenging. 138 Demands for change that do not reflect the institutional logic -- that is, demands that do not engage and subsequently reinforce the dominant ideology -- will probably be ineffective. 139 The possibility for ideological change is created through the very process of legitimation, which is triggered by crisis. Powerless people can sometimes trigger such a crisis by challenging an institution internally, that is, by using its own logic against it. 140 Such crisis occurs when powerless people force open and politicize a contradiction between the dominant ideology and their reality. The political consequences [\*1368] of maintaining the contradictions may sometimes force an adjustment -- an attempt to close the gap or to make things appear fair. 141 Yet, because the adjustment is triggered by the political consequences of the contradiction, circumstances will be adjusted only to the extent necessary to close the apparent contradiction.

#### Their alternative is fratricidal for both research and strategy. Critique of the racial state shouldn’t preclude appeals to state-based politics.

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Abstract As new social relations produce new kinds of social subjects, scholars in American Studies and Area Studies experience anxieties about disciplinary as well as geographic borders. The Civil Rights tradition of the 14th Amendment plays an important role within progressive American Studies scholarship, but in the course of seeking equality and exclusion within the USA, this tradition runs the risk of occluding the role of the nation in the world and its central role in creating and preserving inequality and injustice in other nations. An emerging emphasis on struggles for social justice without seeking state power encapsulates many of the most progressive impulses within Area Studies and transnational studies, yet this perspective runs the risk of occluding the enduring importance of the nation-state in inflecting global developments with local histories and concerns. The present moment challenges us to draw on both traditions, and to use each to critique the shortcomings of the other, while at the same time promoting an inclusionary, nonsectarian, and mutually supportive dialogue about our differences. Keywords American Studies ● Area Studies ● inequality ● transnationalism In Jack Conroy’s 1935 short story ‘The Weed King’, a stubborn Missouri farmer wages a one person war against the weeds that spring up in his fields. Believing that farming would be an easy job if it were not for the weeds, he dedicates himself to their eradication with a zeal that astounds his fellow workers. The ‘weed king’ embraces his war against weeds as his reason for being. ‘His only vanity,’ Conroy tells us, is his belief that he has ‘put the quietus to more weeds than any man, woman, child or beast west of the Mississippi’ (Conroy, 1985: 101). Even in the winter time when snow covers the ground, the zealot worries night and day about the tiny seeds waiting to bloom in the spring. One of his neighbors points out that weeds have their uses too, that many of them have greatly-needed medicinal powers. However, the weed king is not deterred. He soon succeeds in suppressing most of the weeds on his property. His singleminded zealotry has its costs, however. The measures he takes to kill the weeds prove fatal to his crops as well. At the present moment of tumultuous transformation and change, scholars in American Studies and Area Studies might be tempted to emulate the weed king, to keep a keen eye on our fields to protect what we have been cultivating for so many years, to view each other’s work with trepidation and counter-insurgent zeal. American Studies scholars worry that the growing enthusiasm for transnational studies threatens to focus too much on exchanges across national boundaries, in the process occluding the unique, particular, and specific inflections given to those processes by distinct national histories, cultures, and politics. Area Studies specialists, many of whom have been part of a decades-long tradition dedicated to constructing epistemologies and ontologies that resist the hegemony of the monolingual, monocultural, and nationalist scholarship of the US academy, rightly fear that a transnational or postnational American Studies might simply project American Exceptionalism onto a broader geographic terrain. Outside the USA, specialists in both American Studies and Area Studies have reason to fear that (wittingly or unwittingly) scholars from the USA will use the power of US capital, communications media, and commerce to substitute a US-centric monologue masquerading as a dialogue for the greatly needed polylateral communication and collaboration that a transnational world requires. At a time when substantive changes in social structures, technology, and politics are radically reconfiguring the relations linking culture, time, and place, policing the boundaries of disciplines speaks to deep desires for continuity and certainty. It is possible to look at the current ferment in our fields and see only what is being lost, to become subsumed with melancholy about lost conversations and conventions. Yet scholarly research should be conducted out of conviction, rather than out of habit. If we are not careful, our work can come to resemble Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz’s definition of Scandinavian cooking – something passed down from generation to generation for no apparent reason (Hannerz, 1992: 42). Like the weed king, we can worry night and day about the purity of our fields. As new social relations throw forth fundamentally new social subjects with new epistemologies, ontologies, archives, and imaginaries, new patterns of scholarly inquiry will inevitably emerge. Will shallow forms of cultural and ideological critique eclipse the grounded insights produced by ethnography or social history? Will the fetishes of archival and ethnographic research methods produce empiricist and myopic work lacking in self-reflexivity? Will comparative work lack the cultural and linguistic depth traditionally produced by primarily national studies? Will national studies ignore the ways in which nationalism itself is a transnational project? Will the proliferation of new social subjects and new objects of study come at the expense of marginalizing aggrieved social groups or will it teach us how social identities become conflated with power in richly generative and productive ways? It is understandable that these kinds of questions arise when we try to do our work. Anything worth doing can nonetheless be done badly, and principled questions from colleagues protect our interests as well as theirs. Yet counter-insurgency is a poor model for scholarly work, and too much attention to pulling out weeds can kill the crops. Even more important, weeds can have curative powers if we learn to use them correctly. The author of ‘The Weed King’ confided to his biographer that his mother believed that ‘weeds’ were simply plants for which no use had yet been found (Wixon, 1994: 32). The ‘weeds’ that invade a field can also inform it in crucially important ways if we learn to recognize their curative powers. Within American Studies, the tradition of 14th Amendment Americanism may seem like the quintessential expression of American exceptionalism. Forged from the freedom dreams and collective struggles of an enslaved people, the 14th Amendment stands as an enduring symbol of the accomplishments of the abolition democracy that ended slavery in the wake of the Civil War. More than a specific Constitutional provision promising equal treatment under law, the 14th Amendment has functioned as a widely shared social warrant authoring and authorizing new ways of knowing and new ways of being. In his indispensable work, Black Reconstruction in America, W.E.B. Du Bois demonstrated how slaves fighting for their freedom soon realized that it would not be enough to be merely ‘free’ in a society premised on their exclusion. In the course of staging a general strike in the fields, running away from slavery to swell the ranks of the Union army, and joining together to work land liberated by military force, they formulated a political perspective that Du Bois named ‘abolition democracy’ (Du Bois, 1995). They fought for the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. At the Charleston Black Convention in 1865 they called for more than nominal freedom, for the development of their full being as humans. Between 1865 and 1877 they fashioned alliances with poor whites to elect progressive majorities to office, and their successes led to the first universal public education systems in the South, to governments that subsidized the general economic infrastructure rather than just the privileges and property of the elite. Although betrayed by the Compromise of 1877, by the removal of federal troops from the South, by the legal consolidation of the combination of sharecropping and Jim Crow Segregation, and by Supreme Court decisions that took protections away from black people and extended them to corporations, abolition democracy and the 14th Amendment successfully challenged the hegemony of white male Protestant propertied power. It opened the door for subsequent claims for social justice by immigrants and their children, religious minorities, women, workers and people with disabilities. From voting rights to affirmative action, from fair housing to fair hiring, the 14th Amendment is an enduring and abiding force for social justice in US society. Yet American Studies scholarship that subsumes social justice under the rubric of the 14th Amendment runs the risk of ignoring the position of the USA in the world. Celebrating struggles for citizenship inside the USA can work to strengthen the distinctions between citizens and aliens, providing legitimation for nationalist and nativist policies that impose enormous suffering on humans precisely because they are not US citizens. The legacy of the 14th Amendment has not prevented women and blacks in contemporary California from supporting anti-immigrant nativism through Proposition 187, aimed at denying immigrants and their children needed state services, or through Proposition 227, banning bilingual education in the state’s classrooms. Post-1965 immigrants from Asia, who owe their entry into to the USA to the civil rights movement and its exposure of previous national origin quotas as racist, have not been immune to pursuing the privileges of whiteness for themselves by opposing affirmative action and school desegregation policies vital to the well-being of blacks and Latinos. At the same time, the power inequalities that separate even the most aggrieved US citizens from the masses of poor and working people around the world can render struggles for full 14th Amendment rights by US citizens to be little more than what Martin Luther King, Jr used to describe as ‘an equal right to do wrong’. Certainly the prominence of Colin Powell and Condoleeza Rice in forging the rationale for the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq demonstrates the limits of this form of inclusion. If abolition democracy emblematizes the emancipatory tradition within American Studies, the idea of collective and linked struggles for change without aiming for control over any one state expresses the uniquely generative stance within transnational social movements and transnational scholarship. Articulated in the form of a manifesto in John Holloway’s Change the World Without Taking Power, this sensibility has taken on activist form in the work of the EZLN in Mexico, the Gabriela Network in the Philippines, and the Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence in that Japanese prefecture (Holloway, 2002). These movements make demands on the state and recognize the specificity of national histories, cultures and politics, but their aspirations and activities cannot be contained with any single national context. The activities of the Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence (OWAAMV) demonstrate the importance of a transnational perspective that goes beyond the history, culture, and politics of any single nation state (Fukumura and Matsuoka, 2002). Coming from a country that has been serially colonized since the 17th century and occupied militarily by both the USA and Japan, OWAAMV activists cannot solve their problems within a single national context. Disadvantaged by colonial status, race, and gender, they cannot turn to national liberation, anti-racism or feminism as their sole context for struggle. Coming from a small island with a limited population in a corner of the world far removed from metropolitan centers of power, they must forge alliances with outsiders based on political affinities and identifications, rather than counting on the solidarities of sameness that sustain most social movements. As eyewitnesses to brutal combat on the island in 1945 that killed more than 130,000 Okinawan civilians (one-third of the local population) and tens of thousands of Japanese and US military personnel, they find it impossible to celebrate organized violence and masculinist militarism (Hein and Selden, 2003: 13). As women confronted with the pervasive presence of commercial sex establishments, sex tourism and rapes of civilian women and girls by military personnel, they see gender as a central axis of power and struggle. The complicated history that brought the OWAAMV into existence, and which vexes them in so many ways, has produced new ways of being and new ways of knowing that contain enormous generative power for scholars in Ethnic Studies and American Studies. They do not seek to make their nation militarily superior to others. Instead, they argue that massive preparation for war increases rather than decreases the likelihood of violence. Moreover, they argue that military spending creates security for states and financial institutions but not for people. They charge that expenditures on war serve to contain and control people like themselves who oppose the global economic system, who challenge neoliberal policies designed to privatize state assets, lower barriers to trade and limit the power of local entities to regulate the environment. Perhaps most important, they call for a new definition of ‘security’, one that places the security of women, children and ordinary people before the security of the state and financial institutions. They ‘queer’ the nation – not because they take an explicit position on the rights of gays and lesbians, but because they interrupt and contest the narrative of patriarchal protection upon which the nation-state so often rests. By necessity, the OWAAMV go beyond the categories and cognitive mappings of area studies. They are citizens of Japan, but also victims of Japanese and US colonialism. On most issues, they feel more in solidarity with the indigenous Sovereignty Movement in Hawai’i or the Gabriela network mobilizing against sex tourism and sex work near military bases than they do with their fellow citizens of Japan. The nature of US imperialism forces them to seek alliances with pacifists and feminists in the USA, with Puerto Rican activists fighting against US military exercises on the island of Vieques, and with the Okinawans transported to Bolivia during the Cold War era when the Japanese and US governments relocated them in that South American nation so their land could be appropriated for military uses. They feel solidarity with witnesses to war and empire everywhere, recognizing that the things that have happened in their part of the Pacific cannot be contained within any one ‘area’ of study. Transnational organizing of mobilizations for change, without directly seeking to take state power, speak directly to the new circuits and networks of power emerging from new forms of production, consumption, communication and repression. They often display brilliant ingenuity in fashioning seemingly unlikely short-term alliances, affinities and identifications with people across class, gender, race and national lines. Yet this very tactical dexterity makes it difficult to turn temporary victories into long-term institutional changes. Strategies that manifest the mobility and dynamism required for challenging transnational corporations and financial institutions often lack the concentrated power needed to challenge the enduring power of the state and its control over the prisons, armies and police agencies deployed in support of private power everywhere. Even more important, flexible, fluid and dynamic coalitions often lack both the organic solidarity and the connecting ideology that make movements successful. Groups engaged in this kind of struggle can become unexpected allies in each other’s struggles, but they can also easily be manipulated into fighting against each other if they do not develop a systemic analysis of global power. Scholars can be pitted against each other as easily as aggrieved communities can. In an era of carefully orchestrated challenges to public education, scholarly independence and critical thinking, it is likely in the near future that every department, discipline and field will be encouraged to defend its own worth by belittling others, to compete for scarce and declining resources by inflating its own achievements at the expense of others. A losing proposition in politics, this ‘race to the bottom’ would be even more disastrous for scholarship because it encourages parochialism and defensive localism at precisely the moment when we most need dialogue, generosity and cosmopolitanism. It is important in this context to identify and learn from scholarly works that offer models of principled and productive synthesis between American Studies and Area Studies. Fortunately, both well established classics and promising new work in both American Studies and Area Studies contain this generative potential. The scholarly works of W.E.B. Du Bois and Walter Rodney provide especially useful and generative models from the past, while recent studies by Melani McAlister, Lise Waxer, Roderick Ferguson and Clyde Woods pose bold and exciting challenges in the present (Ferguson, 2004; McAlister, 2001; Waxer, 2002; Woods, 1998).

#### State-phobia entrenches inequality.

Kaspar **VILLADSEN** Associate Professor, Department of Management, Politics & Philosophy, CBS, Denmark **AND** Mitchell **DEAN** Sociology @ Newcastle **’12** “State-Phobia, Civil Society, and a Certain Vitalism,” *Constellations* 19 (3) p.414-417

A Vitalist Metaphysics? There are of course differences between Rose’s diagnostics of the present and the messianic narrative of Hardt and Negri with its duality of Empire and multitude. While the multitude is the vast, unmediated, immanent, and dispersed social subject permeated by, but nevertheless potentially subversive to, imperial domination, Rose avoids the binary around power and resistance by pointing to a set of mobile and multiple “conflicting points of opposition, alliance, and division of labor.”97 Moreover, these communities and somatic individuals are not spontaneous foci of resistance but are themselves produced in engagement with governmental practices and strategies and with newforms of knowledge and technologies. For Rose, things are never so simple as the phrases “from above” and “from below” would suggest. Such differences aside, however, we submit that there are deep affinities between the authors: they share a fascination with the “bio,” no doubt related to the successes of biomedicine and biotechnology around the turn of the twenty-first century, and concern for the deep ethical and political problems they raised. Biopolitics becomes central – albeit via different paths – to both projects, underneath which we find a common desire to discover a politics based on life and the living, on the energetic, the creative, the vital, and the nomadic. In Hardt and Negri, this vitalism takes the form of the “lived experience of the global multitude” that incarnates the will to be against98; Rose, quoting Deleuze, asserts that “we should oppose all that which stands in the way of life being its own telos” and that we should instead be “in favor of life, of ‘the obstinate, stubborn, indomitable will to live’.”99 Both privilege a politics that indicates “lines of flight” that are always in danger of becoming recuperated, organized, systematized, and programmed by systems of power and domination. We can hardly miss the similarities to the expressive and diverse singularity of the multitude when Rose speaks of those “moments of minoring, of breaking away, creating something new within the most traditional political forms, as when new practices of mobilization and protest are invented within the most organized forms of strikes, where new and mobile subjectivities form, swarm, and dissipate in mass mobilizations, marches, and demonstrations.”100 Where Hardt and Negri incarnate the vital in the multitude, Rose discovers it in a certain nomadic attitude to forms of struggle and contestation, or even the vital self-creative forces found in them. In spite of his complex reading of Canguilhem’s vitalism,101 however, we might ask whether and to what extent Rose joins with Hardt and Negri in invoking the Deleuzian “creative plenitude of a singular vitality.” Both approaches claim to dissolve the traditional state/civil society binary to indicate a new kind of politics beyond the state. However, they both oddly reinvent the traditional privilege given to the inventiveness, creativity, and mobility found not in the “rigidities” of the state and formal political organizations, but in a domain of energy, expression, and vitality that lies beyond them, opposes them, or occasionally breaks forth inside them. While we might characterize the multitude as a kind of hyper civil society, Rose’s “non-conventional communities” and “moments of minoring”103 that can be found even in the interstices of conventional political action and forms more closely resemble the quasi-natural creativity and vitality of a liberal civil society. This vitalism as well as the dissolution of the state and state-based politics that Rose and Hardt and Negri share could perhaps be traced to their parallel inspiration from Gilles Deleuze and his discovery in Foucault of “a certain vitalism” in which life is understood as “the capacity to resist force.”104 Lying outside the limitations and forms of the Foucauldian triad of knowledge, power, and subjectivity, this vitality is an ever-expressive reservoir of the virtual. One reason why these authors do not worry about such mundane problem as state organization and its role in establishing and maintaining civil peace, regulated freedom, and resource distribution is that the forces they wish to pave the way for concern the irruption of unspecified virtualities. Indeed, the “multitude” and “Empire” are for Hardt and Negri not representations of really existing ontological entities; they are “tools for identifying tendencies and imagining projects of constitution” that they believe already exist “in potential in the real.”105 For Rose, similarly, “an explicit and agonistic ethico-politics” is a potentiality inherent in our “plural present” where “creative ways of thinking and acting” offer “some limited grounds for optimism.”106 The ontology of potentiality, when mobilized by Hardt and Negri – and perhaps too by Rose – seems to privilege a world with less fixed structures, less universals, and accordingly less state – and hence a politics that is mobile, fluid, and nomadic. In both cases, what we have is a set of transcendent set of truth claims about valued political action that paradoxically emerge from an anti-foundationalist theory or analysis. These claims are grounded in the will to resist we find in the multitude’s lived experience or as the expression of an indomitable will to live. This politics has little to do with practical engagement with specific problems using an analysis of political forces and the resources available to achieve certain ends. As such, there is a case to be made for examining the affinity of these contemporary radicals with the “political romanticism” of the young revolutionaries who viewed the French Revolution simply as an organic expression of the free spirit.107Conclusion: Risks and Potentials

We have indicated several urgent concerns related to the state-phobia of influential postFoucauldian positions. The rather one-sided privileging of civil society or its proxies entails a number of risks. First, arguments for granting more space to the “diversity” of civil society, for instance in the shape of “ethico-political movements,” run the risk of reifying and solidifying differences of a social nature. Concepts of “diversity” or “difference” typically signify a diversity of lifestyles, personal values, community attitudes, ethnicities, etc. that should be respected, left to thrive and release their innovative potentials. However, differences are not just there to be respected prior to their discursive mobilization; even for Foucault, they are produced within different strategies and relations of power. This poses a serious problem for non-contextualized fascinations with the diversity of civil society. Second, identifying civil society as the site of ethical practices or even instructive morals easily leads to the identification of some “Other” that threatens to contaminate it: “The simple family remedy of identifying civil society with ethical life not only avoids confrontation with the uncivil nature of civil society, but opens the gate to the hunt for the Alien or the Other deemed responsible for its deformations.”108 While neither Rose nor Hard and Negri construct the state as Nietzsche’s “coldest of all cold monsters” or as Hobbes’ monstrous Leviathan, the state and the politics around it become a kind of occluded other. In Rose, the universalizing logics of the social state are displaced by a vital politics that opens new potentials of somatic individuality and self-creation. In Hardt and Negri, the nation state could only be viewed as a reactive modern order that is today irrelevant to the new vital forces of the multitude unleashed by immaterial production. The anti-state rendering of Foucault’s thinking on the state which we have detected in influential contemporary intellectuals displays a selective reading of what his statements actually said. Nevertheless, reinserting the problem of the state in post-Foucauldian thinking may require more than excavating, however carefully, Foucault’s own balanced position on the modern state. We will merely point out two key challenges that loosely reflect the above-mentioned risks. First, state planning and national policies have traditionally rested upon producing objective knowledge about the domains of economy, population, and society. By contrast, in post-structural thinking on civil society, the truth about society cannot be objectively known – it is created locally where it is diversely lived and experienced. Perhaps, then, a necessary counter-move for contemporary governmentality studies and poststructuralists would be to more broadly find ways of combining their deconstructivist tools with forms of knowledge that claim to speak the truth about society – for instance by mapping patterns of inequality or documenting the effects of social security or access to education. We regard the work of Randy Lippert and Kevin Stenson109 to be highly promising in this respect. Second, the imaginary of civil society as the site of ethical life entails that the ordering of the state be subordinated to this self-sustaining and vibrating life-world. Such subordination, discernable in contemporary civil society discourse and in our thinkers, runs counter to at least one key strand of post-Enlightenment thought that recognized the necessity of reconciling the recurring problems and “contradictions” of civil society with the substantive political and legal universality of the state. This, of course, raises the question as to whether it is possible to assert the necessity of a balance whereby the state would guarantee the freedom of citizens and collectivities on the basis of rational and calculable norms without taking an ahistorical or transcendental position. The most obvious way of tackling this question would be to ground this normativity in the genealogy of liberal-capitalist societies and the historically specific effects of the coexistence of formal equality (stipulated by modern rights of citizenship and the liberal legal and political order) and actual economic inequality (created and exacerbated by capitalist economies). Here, the emergence of the “Social Question” and the formation of a social domain in the nineteenth-century are paramount.110 Foucault did point to the tension arising from the concomitant advent of the juridical subject of right and the economic subject of interest, which he saw as posing a key problem for how government could function and be justified in welfare states. However, it was his interlocutors – most notably Donzelot, Procacci, and above all Castel – who described the governmental technologies and political rationalities that arose to resolve or navigate this tension: social insurance, social provision, and the social sciences.111 By taking this route, they went further than Foucault in arguing for the durability and eventhe necessity of “the social” as both a key zone of government, a fundamental object of interventions in liberal-capitalist states and a source of critical normativity.112 To be sure, Foucault strictly kept away from questions of the justification of state power in favor of an analytical critique whose focus is on the forms of veridiction (or truth-production) that governmental rationalities would take up. His painstaking descriptions of the forms of market rationality that liberal governmentality would mobilize display some of the potential costs of adhering to a market regime of veridiction.113 Today, notions of civil society as the site of personal bonds, self-expression, and cultural forces and of life as a domain of vitality opposed to conventional state politics or imperial domination have become key sites of veridiction. Foucault would probably be more concerned to lay out the effects of such truth production in terms of different governmental rationalizations. He would probably urge us to side with neither those who grant a priori privilege to these proxies of authenticity, virtue, and innovation, nor with radical advocates for state- or market-based regulation. The task would rather be one of taking aim at the practical political problems in the present while contesting naturalized and pre-given fixations of particular sites and agencies from which progressive innovation and critique is expected to originate.

### AT: Policies Bad

#### Legacy of slavery doesn’t preclude combating current oppression—working within the system can succeed

Shelby 7—Tommie Shelby, Professor of African and African American Studies and of Philosophy at Harvard, 2007, [*We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*]

One such pitfall deserves further comment. Many conceptions of black identity include, if only implicitly, an account of the nature of black oppression. In the black nationalist tradition, these narratives generally emphasize the pervasiveness of white supremacy. The legacy of slavery and current racism are treated as the primary obstacles to black flourishing, and shared narratives about racial oppression are reproduced as a part of black cultural heritage. To the extent that this cultural inheritance is embraced as an essential core of black identity itself, it could prove to be a self-imposed obstacle to black emancipation. Thus, for example, when a person accepts a particular analysis of the black condition as a black person as a feature of who he is and not just what he believes—this can lead him to be stubbornly resistant to changing his view of the nature and causes of the black condition in the face of overwhelming evidence. To change his mind about such fundamental social matters would be to him (though he may not consciously recognize it as such) not just a shift in opinion based on evidence but a tragic loss of self-identity, which few are willing to consider, let alone seriously countenance. Now when a whole community accepts a particular analysis of their collective condition as a necessary component of who they are as a people, this can make it extremely difficult for them to reevaluate their shared standing or to recognize differences in standing between the various subgroups within the community. The point here is that an uncritical attachment to a particular conception of blackness where this includes a common narrative about the social status and material conditions of the group can undermine the group's ability to arrive at an objective assessment of their shared problems and possible solutions. Given the need to distinguish between the impact on blacks' life prospects of current racism, historical racism, and nonracial social dynamics, it is essential that blacks not embrace a collective ethnocultural identity that collapses these distinctions or misconstrues their current significance.

#### Specific policy proposals is key to alt’s appeal and success—the abstract nature of their alt guarantee political obsolescence

Shelby 7—Tommie Shelby, Professor of African and African American Studies and of Philosophy at Harvard, 2007, [*We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*]

But African American philosophy does not typically make public policy recommendations. Although engaged with social realities and historical events, its mode of inquiry still tends to be relatively abstract and somewhat tentative in its conclusions, often asking more questions than it answers. It operates at the level of general principles rather than offering concrete proposals for social change. The intellectual culture of the United States has a strong bias against speculative inquiry, and thus philosophical work of the kind I engage in here may frustrate some readers, especially those interested in ideas largely for their immediate practical application to concrete problems. Political philosophy in particular can appear as worthless pontification or superfluous splitting of hairs. Moreover, given that African American philosophy scrutinizes and defends basic normative ideals, it might seem to be hopelessly Utopian, as engaged in painting a picture of an ideal world in which none of us will ever live. Because of this, some who are eager to get on with the important work of changing the world and not merely interpreting it become impatient with philosophical reflection—often concluding that, at best, it is irrelevant to practical matters or, at worst, it is a meaningless form of recreation engaged in by a self-important cadre of the intellectual elite. This study hopes to vindicate African American philosophy of the charge of practical irrelevance by using philosophical techniques to analyze current social problems that African Americans face.

The Structure of the Book

Chapter 1 foreshadows my core themes and conclusions by offering a new interpretation of the political philosophy of Martin R. Delany, a mid-nineteenth-century radical abolitionist and one of the founders of black nationalism. Competing strands in Delany's social thought—"classical" nationalism and "pragmatic" nationalism—offer two different foundations for black political solidarity. I argue that the pragmatic variant is the more cogent of the two, and the one that can still serve usefully as a theoretical schema through which African Americans can understand and carry out important political projects.

Chapter 2 takes up the challenge that class differentiation among black Americans poses for their solidarity, a subject Du Bois grappled with throughout his life. Focusing on his account of the relationship between black ideals, political solidarity, self-help strategies, and elite leadership, I argue that Du Bois, while never fully rebutting the charge of elitism often made against him, puts forward a conception of black solidarity that fuses moral principle, racial identification, and self-interest into a motivational basis for collective action across class differences. This account does not eliminate the threat of class-based fragmentation within the greater black population, but it does show that, despite growing class differentiation and social cleavages, black American political cooperation on terms of fairness and equal respect is still possible. It also helps us to better understand the significance of black pride and militancy for black politics.

In Chapter 3 I examine the conception of black solidarity that was initially urged by Malcolm X and then later developed by Black Power advocates during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Despite several critical flaws, this thinking still shapes the political orientation of many African Americans today. I criticize the Black Power conception of black solidarity, focusing specifically on its commitment to black institutional autonomy, its social analysis of the black condition in terms of white supremacy, its treatment of the black population as a cohesive kinship unit that is capable of speaking with one voice, and its tendency to exclude, marginalize, and sometimes alienate needed nonblack allies.

In light of the problems with Black Power but retaining its key insights, in Chapter 4 I offer an alternative conception of black political solidarity. I argue that black unity must operate across multiracial political organizations; it must recognize that the sources of black disadvantage cannot all be reduced to racism; and it should acknowledge the need for a decentralized network of black advocacy. This conception identifies the basic aims, political principles, and proper scope of black politics. It also suggests a way to conceive of the relationship between the demands of racial justice and the ideal of racial equality.

In Chapter 5 I critically discuss black cultural nationalism (or cultural pluralism). I argue against including the goal of cultural autonomy among the basic aims of black political solidarity, and I suggest that the so-called politics of difference is not an appropriate model for contemporary black politics. I first provide a general characterization of the ideal of black cultural self-determination in the form of eight tenets, ranging from the claim that there is a distinct black culture to the thesis that blacks are, and should be regarded as, the foremost interpreters of the meaning and worth of their cultural ways. I then highlight the conceptual and normative errors that are frequently committed by those who defend this conception of cultural politics.

Once again using Du Bois as a point of departure, in Chapter 6 I offer an extended discussion of the relationship between social identity and political solidarity. Relying on the analytical groundwork developed in previous chapters, I distinguish thin conceptions of blackness, which view black identity as a vague social marker imposed from outside, from thick conceptions, which view the marker as signifying something "deeper," perhaps even something that blacks can autonomously and positively embrace as a component of their self-conception. I show that a shared thick black identity, whether "racial," ethnic, cultural, or national, is not needed for political solidarity and that, in fact, the attempts to develop such an identity are counterproductive to blacks' emancipatory aims.

In the conclusion I elaborate the pragmatic nationalist conception of political solidarity. I draw out the implications of the foregoing argument by integrating its various strands. In particular, I offer an interpretation of the ideal of black self-determination that demonstrates the coherence of the pragmatic nationalist outlook and its relationship to the broader nationalist tradition in African American political thought. This interpretation highlights a significant but often unnoticed connection between the value of individual autonomy and the emancipatory aims of black unity, revealing important common ground between political liberalism and black nationalism, which many scholars have overlooked.

### AT: Burn it Down Alternative

#### Voting for them is a performative contradiction – revolutionary rhetoric against *all that is* inherently contradictory. Constructive appeals to what *could be* are a basic rhetorical requirement.

Celeste **CONDIT** Speech Communication @ Georgia **AND** John **LUCAITES** Speech Comm. @ Indiana **’93** “Malcolm X and the Limits of the Rhetoric of Revolutionary Dissent” *Journal of Black Studies* 23 (3) p. 308-309

TOWARD CONSIDERATION OF THE LIMITS OFTHE RHETORIC OF REVOLUTIONARY DISSENT Malcolm X was the herald of the revolution of Black consciousness in the 1960s. He helped to give Black America the self- confidence to scare White America into negotiating with it (see Cone, 1991; Lucaites & Condit, 1990). The limits of that revolutionary rhetoric are all too clear today. Malcolm X did not change the racist underpinnings of America's economic structures, nor did he have a very direct impact on altering America's political system. These limits, however, can hardly be located in Malcolm X himself, for as a leader he stretched both his own thoughts and the vision of Black America far beyond the social and political horizons that had been publicly articulated prior to his expression of them. His inability to attract a large following derived as much as anything from the fact that he was so very far ahead of his people; they needed time, the time they would get upon his death, to catch up with him. The limits that Malcolm X ultimately faced were inherent to a revolutionary rhetoric of dissent that leaves language in control. Revolutionary rhetoric typically characterizes itself as seeking to change an entire social and political system at one move, rather than to reform it piece by piece. Dissent is always against something. A dissenter can "talk" revolution right up to the point of violence, but violence is antithetical to all ideas-indeed, it is the very abrogation of ideas. The ultimate act of dissent thus stands in fundamental opposition to the crafting of a constructive rhetoric. Constructive rhetorics require a commitment on the part of both speakers and audiences (or opponents in a dispute) to common values, however radical, which hold a greater appeal than the enactment of violence. It was thus not simply the ethics of the world in which he operated that kept Malcolm X from launching an organized, violent attack against White America. Rather, it was his implicit commitment to rhetoric as a means of social and political action that led him down this path. One might locate the roots of this commitment in his earlier experiences as a hustler and confidence man. After all, a hustler may sometimes succeed by threatening violence, but seldom are such threats realized. As Detroit Red in the 1940s, Malcolm X had lived in the lawless and violent underworld of Harlem, a world lacking articulate values and commitments; it was not a world he wanted for his people, and, once he discovered this, he devoted his life to searching for viable alternatives. The limits of Malcolm X's revolutionary dissent were, therefore, limits willingly, if uncomfortably, self-imposed. They were limits inherent to rhetoric itself. A rhetor takes up the burden to persuade an audience, no matter how difficult the task, not to beat it into submission. Persuasion depends on the values and beliefs that exist or that can be reasonably constructed in conjunction with an audience. It also requires social and political negotiation, and it eschews the act of violence at all cost. A rhetor must, therefore, finally abjure a true revolution, which calls for an unfettered and absolute rejection of all that is, in favor of a torturous path through the constructive visions of what might be**.** This was the path that Malcolm X chose, and it is a path that those who today recall his appeals to "the ballot or the bullet" and to "all means necessary" as rallying cries for contemporary political action would do well to reconsider.

### AT: Social Death/Contemporary Slavery Impact

#### Equating present conditions with slavery annihilates agency—their ontological account of social death is wrong.

Nadine Ehlers, Professor, School of Social Sciences, Media, and Communication Faculty of Law, Humanities, and Arts University of Wollongong, 12 [“Racial Imperatives: Discipline, Performativity, and Struggles against Subjection,” p. 9-12, footnote from p. 145]

While I deploy these terms for analytic convenience, the study pivots on the desire to make dear tbe false homogeneity of subjects that are denoted by these terms and the arbitrariness of race per se. In the same moment that I employ these terms as critical tools of analysis, then, I hope to expose the mechanisms of their production and mark possibilities for their rearticulation. The final portion of this study is concerned with examining what forms of agency and resistance are possible within the context of this binary construction of black and white identities. Guiding this analysis is the question of how individuals struggle against subjection and how racial norms might be recited in new directions, given that the coercive demands of discipline and performative constraints make it seem like race is an insurmountable limit or closed system. **That race operates as a limit appears particularly so for black subjects.** For despite the fact that all subjects are produced and positioned within and by the discursive formations of race, the impact of that positioning and what it means for experience is markedly different. Black subjects are situated within an antiblack context where the black body/self continues to be torn asunder within the relations of civil society. This means that, as Yancy (2008, 134 n. n) insists, " the capacity to imagine otherwise is seriously truncated by ideological and material forces that are systematically linked to the history of white racism!'

A number of scholars have examined these realities and advanced critical accounts of what they identify as the resulting condition of black existence. David Marriot, for instance, argues that "the occult presence of racial slavery" continues to haunt our political and social imagination: "nowhere, but nevertheless everywhere, a dead time which never arrives and does not stop arriving" (2007, xxi). Saidiya Hartman, in her provocative Lose Your Mother: A journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route (2007) refers to this haunting as slavery's afterlife. She insists that we do not live with the residue or legacy of slavery but, rather, that slavery lives on. It 'survives' (Sexton 2010, 15), through what Loic Wacquant (2002, 41) has identified as slavery's fu nctional surrogates: Jim Crow, the ghetto, and the prison. For Hartman, as echoed by other scholars, slavery has yet to be undone:

Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery- skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery. (2007, 6)

Frank B. Wilderson III, in his Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structures of U.S. Antagonisms (2009), powerfully frames slavery's afterlife as resulting in a form of **social death** for black subjects and, more than this, he argues that black subjectivity is constituted as **ontological death**. For Wilderson, " the Black [is) a subject who is always already positioned as Slave" (2009, 7) in the United States, while everyone else exists as "Masters" (2009, 10 ).8

Studies of slavery's afterlife and the concept of social death have inarguably made essential contributions to understandings of race.9 The strengths of such analyses lie in the salient ways they have theorized broad social systems of racism and how they have demanded the foregrounding of suffering, pain, violence, and death. Much of this scholarship can be put or is productively in conversation with Foucault's account ofbiopolitics that, as I noted earlier, regulates at the level of the population. Where sovereignty 'took life and let live,' in the contemporary sphere biopolitics works to 'make live.' However, certain bodies are not in the zone of protected life, are indeed expendable and subjected to strategic deployments of sovereign power that 'make die.' It is here that Foucault positions the function of racism. It is, he argues, "primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die" (2003b, 254). Thus, certain bodies/subjects are killed - or subjected to sovereign power and social death- so that others might prosper. 10

In Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (1997), Hartman examines the 'must die' imperative of social death understood broadly as a lack of social being-but she also illuminates how, within such a context, slave "performance and other modes of practice . .. exploit[ed), and exceed[ed] the constraints of domination" (1997, 54, my emphasis). Hartman analyzes quotidian enactments of slave agency to highlight practices of "(counter)investment" (1997, 73) that produced "a reconstructed self that negates the dominant terms of identity and existence" (1997, 72). 11 She thus argues that a form of agency is possible and that, while "the conditions of domination and subjugation determine what kinds of actions are possible or effective" (1997, 54), agency is not reducible to these conditions (1997, 55).'2 The questions that I ask in this analysis travel in this direction, and aim to build on this aspect of Hartman's work. In doing so I make two key claims: first, that despite undeniable historical continuities and structural d)'namics, race is also marked by discontinuity; and second, race is constantly reworked and transformed within relations of power by subjects. 13

**For Vincent** Brown**, a historian of slavery,** ''violence, dislocation, and death actually generate politics, and consequential action by the enslaved" (2009, 1239) . He warns that focusing on an overarching condition or state potentially obscures seeing these politics. More than this, however, it risks positioning relations of power as totalizing and transhistorical, and it risks essentializing experience or the lived realities of individuals. 14 I scale down to the level of the subject to analyze both (a) how subjects are formed, and (b) how subjects – black and white alike – have struggled against conditions in ways that refuse totalizing, immutable understandings of race. This book does not seek to mark a condition or situa tion then, but instead takes up Brown's challenge (made within the context of studies of slavery) to pay attention to efforts to remake condition. Looking to those efforts to remake condition and identity grapples with the microphysics of power and the practices of daily life, enacted by individuals and i11 collective politics, to consider what people do with situations: those dynamic, innovative contestations of (a never totalizing) power. Echoing the call raised by Brown (2009, 1239), my work focuses then on "examining ... social and political lives rather than assuming . . . lack of social being" in order to think about how subjects can and have "made a social world out of death itself" (Brown 2009, 1233) or how, more generally, race can be reconfigured within the broader workings of what I am calling racial discipline and performative imperatives.

But in addressing the quotidian and those efforts to remake condition and identity, this study insists on a shift in perspective in terms of how power is thought about. As I have remarked, I am not focused on biopolitics or what can be seen as solely sovereign forms of power that are deployed to condition who will live and who will die. Instead, I am concerned with disciplinary power, which is articulated simultaneously but at a different level to biopolitics (and despi te the exercise of sovereign forms of power} (Foucault 2003a, 250). For Foucault, this form of power is not absolute, nor does it exist in opposition to resistance. Rather, power is seen as always fragmentary and incoherent, and power and resistance are seen as mutually constitutive. Disciplinary power is productive, in that it generates particular capacities and forms of subjectivity (and, necessarily, agency). And finally, **though subjects are formed in power, they are not reducible to it, not determined by power**.

[BEGIN ENDNOTE]

14. Historian Vincent Brown, in his "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery" (2009), has examined a number of scholars who seemingly take up such a viewpoint, in that they broadly position blackness as a totalizing state that, historically and in the present, renders slavery synonymous with social death and blackness as always already synonymous with slavery. Brown focuses specifically on the academic uptake and what he sees as the problematic distillation and extension of Orlando Patterson's (1981) concept of"slavery as social death;' where social death indicates a lack of social being. As a scholar of slavery, Brown is most concerned with examining the limitations of this idea in relation to the enslaved, but he is also interested in how the idea is used in relation to the present. For Brown, **Patterson's "slavery as social death," and contemporary usages of this concept to account for the present, advance a troubling transhistorical characterization of slavery** He argues in line with I-Ierman Bennett (quoted in Brown 1009, 1133), who has observed:

As the narrative of the slave experience, soclardeath assumes a uniform African, slave, and ultimately black subject rooted in a static New World history whose logic originated in being property and remains confined to slavery. It absorbs and renders exceptional evidence that underscores the contingent nature of experience and consciousness. Thus, normative assumptions about the experiences of peoples of African descent assert a timeless, ahistorical, epiphenomenal "black" cultural experience.

[END ENDNOTE]

#### No social death—history proves

Brown 9—Vincent, Prof. of History and African and African-American Studies @ Harvard Univ. [December, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *American Historical Review*, p. 1231-1249]

THE PREMISE OF ORLANDO PATTERSON’S MAJOR WORK, that enslaved Africans were natally alienated and culturally isolated, was challenged even before he published his influential thesis, primarily by scholars concerned with “survivals” or “retentions” of African culture and by historians of slave resistance. In the early to mid-twentieth century, when Robert Park’s view of “the Negro” predominated among scholars, it was generally assumed that the slave trade and slavery had denuded black people of any ancestral heritage from Africa. The historians Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Du Bois and the anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits argued the opposite. Their research supported the conclusion that while enslaved Africans could not have brought intact social, political, and religious institutions with them to the Americas, they did maintain significant aspects of their cultural backgrounds.32 Herskovits ex- amined “Africanisms”—any practices that seemed to be identifiably African—as useful symbols of cultural survival that would help him to analyze change and continuity in African American culture.33 He engaged in one of his most heated scholarly disputes with the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, a student of Park’s, who empha- sized the damage wrought by slavery on black families and folkways.34 More recently, a number of scholars have built on Herskovits’s line of thought, enhancing our understanding of African history during the era of the slave trade. Their studies have evolved productively from assertions about general cultural heritage into more precise demonstrations of the continuity of worldviews, categories of belonging, and social practices from Africa to America. For these scholars, the preservation of distinctive cultural forms has served as an index both of a resilient social personhood, or identity, and of resistance to slavery itself. 35 Scholars of slave resistance have never had much use for the concept of social death. The early efforts of writers such as Herbert Aptheker aimed to derail the popular notion that American slavery had been a civilizing institution threatened by “slave crime.”36 Soon after, studies of slave revolts and conspiracies advocated the idea that resistance demonstrated the basic humanity and intractable will of the enslaved—indeed, they often equated acts of will with humanity itself. As these writ- ers turned toward more detailed analyses of the causes, strategies, and tactics of slave revolts in the context of the social relations of slavery, they had trouble squaring abstract characterizations of “the slave” with what they were learning about the en- slaved.37 Michael Craton, who authored Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies, was an early critic of Slavery and Social Death, protesting that what was known about chattel bondage in the Americas did not confirm Patterson’s definition of slavery. “If slaves were in fact ‘generally dishonored,’ ” Craton asked, “how does he explain the degrees of rank found among all groups of slaves—that is, the scale of ‘reputation’ and authority accorded, or at least acknowledged, by slave and master alike?” How could they have formed the fragile families documented by social historians if they had been “natally alienated” by definition? Finally, and per- haps most tellingly, if slaves had been uniformly subjected to “permanent violent domination,” they could not have revolted as often as they did or shown the “varied manifestations of their resistance” that so frustrated masters and compromised their power, sometimes “fatally.”38 The dynamics of social control and slave resistance falsified Patterson’s description of slavery even as the tenacity of African culture showed that enslaved men, women, and children had arrived in the Americas bearing much more than their “tropical temperament.” The cultural continuity and resistance schools of thought come together pow- erfully in an important book by Walter C. Rucker, The River Flows On: Black Re- sistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early America. In Rucker’s analysis of slave revolts, conspiracies, and daily recalcitrance, African concepts, values, and cul- tural metaphors play the central role. Unlike Smallwood and Hartman, for whom “the rupture was the story” of slavery, Rucker aims to reveal the “perseverance of African culture even among second, third, and fourth generation creoles.”39 He looks again at some familiar events in North America—New York City’s 1712 Coromantee revolt and 1741 conspiracy, the 1739 Stono rebellion in South Carolina, as well as the plots, schemes, and insurgencies of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner—deftly teasing out the African origins of many of the attitudes and actions of the black rebels. Rucker outlines how the transformation of a “shared cultural heritage” that shaped collective action against slavery corresponded to the “various steps Africans made in the process of becoming ‘African American’ in culture, orientation, and identity.”40

#### The invocation of social death as ontologically inevitable inscribes a pessimism towards politics which makes agency impossible and oversimplifies the history of resistance

Brown 9—Vincent, Prof. of History and African and African-American Studies @ Harvard Univ. [December, “Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery,” *American Historical Review*, p. 1231-1249]

Specters of the Atlantic is a compellingly sophisticated study of the relation be- tween the epistemologies underwriting both modern slavery and modern capitalism, but the book’s discussion of the politics of anti-slavery is fundamentally incomplete. While Baucom brilliantly traces the development of “melancholy realism” as an op- positional discourse that ran counter to the logic of slavery and finance capital, he has very little to say about the enslaved themselves. Social death, so well suited to the tragic perspective, stands in for the experience of enslavement. While this heightens the reader’s sense of the way Atlantic slavery haunts the present, Baucom largely fails to acknowledge that the enslaved performed melancholy acts of accounting not unlike those that he shows to be a fundamental component of abolitionist and human rights discourses, or that those acts could be a basic element of slaves’ oppositional activities. In many ways, the effectiveness of his text depends upon the silence of slaves—it is easier to describe the continuity of structures of power when one down- plays countervailing forces such as the political activity of the weak. So Baucom’s deep insights into the structural features of Atlantic slave trading and its afterlife come with a cost. Without engagement with the politics of the enslaved, slavery’s history serves as an effective charge leveled against modernity and capitalism, but not as an uneven and evolving process of human interaction, and certainly not as a locus of conflict in which the enslaved sometimes won small but important victories.11 Specters of the Atlantic is self-consciously a work of theory (despite Baucom’s prodigious archival research), and social death may be largely unproblematic as a matter of theory, or even law. In these arenas, as David Brion Davis has argued, “the slave has no legitimate, independent being, no place in the cosmos except as an instrument of her or his master’s will.”12 But the concept often becomes a general description of actual social life in slavery. Vincent Carretta, for example, in his au- thoritative biography of the abolitionist writer and former slave Olaudah Equiano, agrees with Patterson that because enslaved Africans and their descendants were “stripped of their personal identities and history, [they] were forced to suffer what has been aptly called ‘social death.’ ” The self-fashioning enabled by writing and print “allowed Equiano to resurrect himself publicly” from the condition that had been imposed by his enslavement.13 The living conditions of slavery in eighteenth-century Jamaica, one slave society with which Equiano had experience, are described in rich detail in Trevor Burnard’s unflinching examination of the career of Thomas Thistle- wood, an English migrant who became an overseer and landholder in Jamaica, and who kept a diary there from 1750 to 1786. Through Thistlewood’s descriptions of his life among slaves, Burnard glimpses a “world of uncertainty,” where the enslaved were always vulnerable to repeated depredations that actually led to “significant slave dehumanization as masters sought, with considerable success, to obliterate slaves’ personal histories.” Burnard consequently concurs with Patterson: “slavery completely stripped slaves of their cultural heritage, brutalized them, and rendered ordinary life and normal relationships extremely difficult.”14 This was slavery, after all, and much more than a transfer of migrants from Africa to America.15 Yet one wonders, after reading Burnard’s indispensable account, how slaves in Jamaica or- ganized some of British America’s greatest political events during Thistlewood’s time and after, including the Coromantee Wars of the 1760s, the 1776 Hanover conspiracy, and the Baptist War of 1831–1832. Surely they must have found some way to turn the “disorganization, instability, and chaos” of slavery into collective forms of belonging and striving, making connections when confronted with alien- ation and finding dignity in the face of dishonor. Rather than pathologizing slaves by allowing the condition of social death to stand for the experience of life in slavery, then, it might be more helpful to focus on what the enslaved actually made of their situation. Among the most insightful texts to explore the experiential meaning of Afro- Atlantic slavery (for both the slaves and their descendants) are two recent books by Saidiya Hartman and Stephanie Smallwood. Rather than eschewing the concept of social death, as might be expected from writing that begins by considering the per- spective of the enslaved, these two authors use the idea in penetrating ways. Hart- man’s Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route and Smallwood’s Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora extend social death beyond a general description of slavery as a condition and imagine it as an experience of self. Here both the promise and the problem with the concept are most fully apparent.16 Both authors seek a deeper understanding of the experience of enslavement and its consequences for the past, present, and future of black life than we generally find in histories of slavery. In Hartman’s account especially, slavery is not only an object of study, but also the focus of a personal memoir. She travels along a slave route in Ghana, from its coastal forts to the backcountry hinterlands, symbolically reversing the first stage of the trek now commonly called the Middle Passage. In searching prose, she meditates on the history of slavery in Africa to explore the precarious nature of belonging to the social category “African American.” Rendering her re- markable facility with social theory in elegant and affective terms, Hartman asks the question that nags all identities, but especially those forged by the descendants of slaves: What identifications, imagined affinities, mythical narratives, and acts of re- membering and forgetting hold the category together? Confronting her own alienation from any story that would yield a knowable genealogy or a comfortable identity, Hartman wrestles with what it means to be a stranger in one’s putative motherland, to be denied country, kin, and identity, and to forget one’s past—to be an orphan.17 Ultimately, as the title suggests, Lose Your Mother is an injunction to accept dis- possession as the basis of black self-definition. Such a judgment is warranted, in Hartman’s account, by the implications of social death both for the experience of enslavement and for slavery’s afterlife in the present. As Patterson delineated in sociological terms the death of social personhood and the reincorporation of individuals into slavery, Hartman sets out on a personal quest to “retrace the process by which lives were destroyed and slaves born.”18 When she contends with what it meant to be a slave, she frequently invokes Patterson’s idiom: “Seized from home, sold in the market, and severed from kin, the slave was for all intents and purposes dead, no less so than had he been killed in combat. No less so than had she never belonged to the world.” By making men, women, and children into commodities, enslavement destroyed lineages, tethering people to own- ers rather than families, and in this way it “annulled lives, transforming men and women into dead matter, and then resuscitated them for servitude.” Admittedly, the enslaved “lived and breathed, but they were dead in the social world of men.”19 As it turns out, this kind of alienation is also part of what it presently means to be African American. “The transience of the slave’s existence,” for example, still leaves its traces in how black people imagine and speak of home: We never tire of dreaming of a place that we can call home, a place better than here, wherever here might be . . . We stay there, but we don’t live there . . . Staying is living in a country without exercising any claims on its resources. It is the perilous condition of existing in a world in which you have no investments. It is having never resided in a place that you can say is yours. It is being “of the house” but not having a stake in it. Staying implies transient quarters, a makeshift domicile, a temporary shelter, but no attachment or affiliation. This sense of not belonging and of being an extraneous element is at the heart of slavery.20 “We may have forgotten our country,” Hartman writes, “but we haven’t forgotten our dispossession.”21 Like Baucom, Hartman sees the history of slavery as a constituent part of a tragic present. Atlantic slavery continues to be manifested in black people’s skewed life chances, poor education and health, and high rates of incarceration, poverty, and premature death. Disregarding the commonplace temporalities of professional historians, whose literary conventions are generally predicated on a formal distinction between past, present, and future, Hartman addresses slavery as a problem that spans all three. The afterlife of slavery inhabits the nature of belonging, which in turn guides the “freedom dreams” that shape prospects for change. “If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America,” she writes, “it is not because of an antiquated obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago.”22 A professor of English and comparative literature, Hartman is in many respects in a better position than most historians to understand events such as the funeral aboard the Hudibras. This is because for all of her evident erudition, her scholarship is harnessed not so much to a performance of mastery over the facts of what hap- pened, which might substitute precision for understanding, as to an act of mourning, even yearning. She writes with a depth of introspection and personal anguish that is transgressive of professional boundaries but absolutely appropriate to the task. Reading Hartman, one wonders how a historian could ever write dispassionately about slavery without feeling complicit and ashamed. For dispassionate accounting—exemplified by the ledgers of slave traders—has been a great weapon of the powerful, an episteme that made the grossest violations of personhood acceptable, even necessary. This is the kind of bookkeeping that bore fruit upon the Zong. “It made it easier for a trader to countenance yet another dead black body or for a captain to dump a shipload of captives into the sea in order to collect the insurance, since it wasn’t possible to kill cargo or to murder a thing already denied life. Death was simply part of the workings of the trade.” The archive of slavery, then, is “a mortuary.” Not content to total up the body count, Hartman offers elegy, echoing in her own way the lamentations of the women aboard the Hudibras. Like them, she is concerned with the dead and what they mean to the living. “I was desperate to reclaim the dead,” she writes, “to reckon with the lives undone and obliterated in the making of human commodities.”23 It is this mournful quality of Lose Your Mother that elevates it above so many histories of slavery, but the same sense of lament seems to require that Hartman overlook small but significant political victories like the one described by Butter- worth. Even as Hartman seems to agree with Paul Gilroy on the “value of seeing the consciousness of the slave as involving an extended act of mourning,” she remains so focused on her own commemorations that her text makes little space for a consideration of how the enslaved struggled with alienation and the fragility of belonging, or of the mourning rites they used to confront their condition.24 All of the ques- tions she raises about the meaning of slavery in the present—both highly personal and insistently political—might as well be asked about the meaning of slavery to slaves themselves, that is, if one begins by closely examining their social and political lives rather than assuming their lack of social being. Here Hartman is undone by her reliance on Orlando Patterson’s totalizing definition of slavery. She asserts that “no solace can be found in the death of the slave, no higher ground can be located, no perspective can be found from which death serves a greater good or becomes any- thing other than what it is.”25 If she is correct, the events on the Hudibras were of negligible importance. And indeed, Hartman’s understandable emphasis on the personal damage wrought by slavery encourages her to disavow two generations of social history that have demonstrated slaves’ remarkable capacity to forge fragile com- munities, preserve cultural inheritance, and resist the predations of slaveholders. This in turn precludes her from describing the ways that violence, dislocation, and death actually generate culture, politics, and consequential action by the enslaved.26 This limitation is particularly evident in a stunning chapter that Hartman calls “The Dead Book.” Here she creatively reimagines the events that occurred on the voyage of the slave ship Recovery, bound, like the Hudibras, from the Bight of Biafra to Grenada, when Captain John Kimber hung an enslaved girl naked from the mizzen stay and beat her, ultimately to her death, for being “sulky”: she was sick and could not dance when so ordered. As Hartman notes, the event would have been unre- markable had not Captain Kimber been tried for murder on the testimony of the ship’s surgeon, a brief transcript of the trial been published, and the woman’s death been offered up as allegory by the abolitionist William Wilberforce and the graphic satirist Isaac Cruikshank. Hartman re-creates the murder and the surge of words it inspired, representing the perspectives of the captain, the surgeon, and the aboli tionist, for each of whom the girl was a cipher “outfitted in a different guise,” and then she puts herself in the position of the victim, substituting her own voice for the unknowable thoughts of the girl. Imagining the experience as her own and wistfully representing her demise as a suicide—a final act of agency—Hartman hopes, by this bold device, to save the girl from oblivion. Or perhaps her hope is to prove the impossibility of ever doing so, because by failing, she concedes that the girl cannot be put to rest. It is a compelling move, but there is something missing. Hartman discerns a convincing subject position for all of the participants in the events sur- rounding the death of the girl, except for the other slaves who watched the woman die and carried the memory with them to the Americas, presumably to tell others, plausibly even survivors of the Hudibras, who must have drawn from such stories a basic perspective on the history of the Atlantic world. For the enslaved spectators, Hartman imagines only a fatalistic detachment: “The women were assembled a few feet away, but it might well have been a thousand. They held back from the girl, steering clear of her bad luck, pestilence, and recklessness. Some said she had lost her mind. What could they do, anyway? The women danced and sang as she lay dying.” Hartman ends her odyssey among the Gwolu, descendants of peoples who fled the slave raids and who, as communities of refugees, shared her sense of dispos- session. “Newcomers were welcome. It didn’t matter that they weren’t kin because genealogy didn’t matter”; rather, “building community did.” Lose Your Mother con- cludes with a moving description of a particular one of their songs, a lament for those who were lost, which resonated deeply with her sense of slavery’s meaning in the present. And yet Hartman has more difficulty hearing similar cries intoned in the past by slaves who managed to find themselves.27 Saltwater Slavery has much in common with Lose Your Mother. Smallwood’s study of the slave trade from the Gold Coast to the British Americas in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries likewise redeems the experience of the people traded like so many bolts of cloth, “who were represented merely as ciphers in the political arithmetic,” and therefore “feature in the documentary record not as subjects of a social history but as objects or quantities.”28 Each text offers a penetrating analysis of the market logic that turned people into goods. Both books work with the concept of social death. However, Smallwood examines the problem of social death for the enslaved even more closely than Hartman does.29 Like Hartman, Smallwood sees social death as a by-product of commodification. “If in the regime of the market Africans’ most socially relevant feature was their exchangeability,” she argues, “for Africans as immigrants the most socially relevant feature was their isolation, their desperate need to restore some measure of social life to counterbalance the alienation engendered by their social death.” But Small- wood’s approach is different in a subtle way. Whereas for Hartman, as for others, social death is an accomplished state of being, Smallwood veers between a notion of social death as an actual condition produced by violent dislocation and social death as a compelling threat. On the one hand, she argues, captivity on the Atlantic littoral was a social death. Exchangeable persons “inhabited a new category of mar- ginalization, one not of extreme alienation within the community, but rather of ab- solute exclusion from any community.” She seems to accept the idea of enslaved commodities as finished products for whom there could be no socially relevant relationships: “the slave cargo constituted the antithesis of community.” Yet elsewhere she contends that captives were only “menaced” with social death. “At every point along the passage from African to New World markets,” she writes, “we find a stark contest between slave traders and slaves, between the traders’ will to commodify people and the captives’ will to remain fully recognizable as human subjects.”30 Here, I think, Smallwood captures the truth of the idea: social death was a receding ho- rizon—the farther slaveholders moved toward the goal of complete mastery, the more they found that struggles with their human property would continue, even into the most elemental realms: birth, hunger, health, fellowship, sex, death, and time. If social death did not define the slaves’ condition, it did frame their vision of apocalypse. In a harrowing chapter on the meaning of death (that is, physical death) during the Atlantic passage, Smallwood is clear that the captives could have no frame of reference for the experience aboard the slave ships, but she also shows how des- perate they were to make one. If they could not reassemble some meaningful way to map their social worlds, “slaves could foresee only further descent into an endless purgatory.” The women aboard the Hudibras were not in fact the living dead; they were the mothers of gasping new societies. Their view of the danger that confronted them made their mourning rites vitally important, putting these at the center of the women’s emerging lives as slaves—and as a result at the heart of the struggles that would define them. As Smallwood argues, this was first and foremost a battle over their presence in time, to define their place among ancestors, kin, friends, and future progeny. “The connection Africans needed was a narrative continuity between past and present—an epistemological means of connecting the dots between there and here, then and now, to craft a coherent story out of incoherent experience.” That is precisely what the women on the Hudibras fought to accomplish.31